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GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

HIGHLIGHTS

Big Cypress

NATIONAL PRESERVE

draft general management plan and
environmental impact statement

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Big Cypress

NATIONAL PRESERVE

draft general management plan and
environmental impact statement

INTRODUCTION

In January 1985 the National Park Service began a process to develop a general management plan (GMP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) for Big Cypress National Preserve in south Florida. The GMP presents a basic management philosophy that meets the legislative requirements for resource protection and for public use and enjoyment of the preserve. It guides the National Park Service in addressing issues and achieving management objectives over a 10- to 15-year period.

The purpose of this document is to highlight the major actions to be proposed in the forthcoming draft GMP/EIS, which is currently scheduled for public review in the near future. A *Federal Register* notice will announce the availability of the draft GMP/EIS at the locations listed on the last page of this document. Public comment will be solicited for 90 days after release of the draft GMP/EIS.

BACKGROUND

In March 1985 four public meetings were held as the first step in the planning process for the GMP/EIS. Following those meetings and other sessions with local, state, and federal agencies, an Important Resource Areas map was prepared and distributed to the public and governmental agencies. This map shows the locations of significant natural resource areas (cypress strands / mixed-hardwood swamps / sloughs, marshes, hardwood hammocks, old-growth pinelands, and mangrove forests) and habitat for threatened or endangered species (red-cockaded woodpeckers, Cape Sable seaside sparrows, bald eagles, and Florida panthers). Miccosukee Indian cultural sites and archeological sites are also considered to be important resources, but they were not shown on the map.

Early in 1987 the Park Service issued an *Alternatives* pamphlet to solicit public opinion on a wide range of planning alternatives for Big Cypress. More than 7,300 people responded to that brochure. A newsletter published in September 1987 summarized the public comments. Those comments, the laws and policies governing the National Park Service, and the congressional mandates found in the legislation creating Big Cypress National Preserve are the basis of the proposed actions and alternatives presented in this document and in the draft GMP/EIS.

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTIONS

Big Cypress National Preserve was established in 1974 by Public Law 93-440 for the purpose of ensuring "the preservation, conservation and protection of the natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values of the Big Cypress Watershed in the State of Florida and to provide for the enhancement and public enjoyment thereof."

The legislation and its history, as they relate to the general management plan, are discussed below.

Legislative Background

A review of the House and Senate reports leading to passage of Public Law 93-440 identifies two fundamental resources in the preserve:

> ***Water*** – The natural flow of freshwater (that is, the watershed) is key to the survival of Everglades National Park as well as the integrity of the entire south Florida ecosystem.
>
> ***Natural values*** – As important as the watershed, the natural, scenic, floral, and faunal values are cited as being worthy of national recognition and protection on their own merit. Recreation is discussed along with the natural values in that these natural resources provide opportunities for recreational pursuits.

The act states that the preserve, as a unit of the national park system, is to be administered in a manner that will ensure its "natural and ecological integrity in perpetuity."

Use and Restrictions

The act and its legislative history identify the following six categories of use that are allowed within the preserve (subject to reasonable regulation):

- uses associated with "improved properties"
- exercise of rights associated with oil and gas
- hunting
- fishing

- trapping
- certain Indian rights

The act further directs that rules and regulations necessary and appropriate to limit or control the following uses be developed:

- motorized vehicles
- exploration for and extraction of oil, gas, and other minerals
- grazing
- the draining or constructing of works or structures that alter natural watercourses
- agriculture
- hunting, fishing, and trapping
- new construction
- such other uses as may need to be limited or controlled

The act gives specific guidelines regarding the development of rules and regulations for hunting, fishing, trapping, and entry, as stated below:

> The Secretary shall permit hunting, fishing, and trapping . . . except that he may designate zones where and periods when no hunting, fishing, trapping, or entry may be permitted for reasons of public safety, administration, floral and faunal protection and management, or public use and enjoyment.

The Senate and House reports also give guidance as to how ORVs are to be managed:

> While the use of all-terrain vehicles must be carefully regulated . . . to protect the natural, wildlife and wilderness values of the Preserve, the bill does not prohibit their use along designated roads and trails.

Furthermore, the act permits the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida,

> subject to reasonable regulations, . . . to continue their usual and customary use and occupancy . . . including hunting, fishing, and trapping on a subsistence basis and traditional tribal ceremonies.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Before the proposed actions were developed, careful consideration was given to previous public and agency input, NPS policies and guidelines, and all pertinent federal laws, including Public Law 93-440. In addition, the natural and cultural resources of Big Cypress were studied, and management issues were defined. Based on this information, planning objectives for each use category or management issue were established. These objectives guided the development of a range of alternatives and, finally, the proposed actions and alternatives contained in the draft GMP/EIS.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS SUMMARY

PLANNING OBJECTIVES FOR MAJOR USES

This highlights document focuses on the proposed actions and alternatives for hunting, off-road vehicle use, visitor services, and minerals management. Among the principal planning objectives for these use categories are the following:

Hunting	*Provide for diverse hunting opportunities at levels compatible with the purposes of the preserve.*
Off-Road Vehicles	*Provide diverse visitor experiences at levels compatible with the purposes of the preserve.*
Visitor Service	*Orient visitors to Big Cypress and foster an understanding of the natural and cultural history of the Big Cypress swamp.* *Provide appropriate, resource-related recreational opportunities.* *Protect public safety.*
Minerals Management	*Permit access for geophysical exploration, exploratory drilling, and production of private oil and gas resources, while at the same time ensuring the following:* *the protection of important resource areas* *the protection of air and water quality in Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park* *the mitigation of surface disturbance* *the restoration of abandoned sites* *Avoid conflicts with visitor use and enjoyment; provide for visitor safety.*

OTHER PLANNING OBJECTIVES

The following planning objectives are addressed in the draft GMP/EIS, but they are not highlighted in this document:

Natural Resource Management:

Water Management	*Restore natural water flows in Big Cypress National Preserve and to Everglades National Park.* *Avoid further hydrological disturbance to the Big Cypress watershed.* *Maintain water quality.*
Vegetation Management	*Maintain habitat for rare and legislatively protected species.* *Control and reduce the spread of exotic plants within Big Cypress National Preserve.* *Protect Everglades National Park from the spread of exotic plants.*

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Fire Management	*Protect public and private property, and provide for visitor safety.*
	Protect important natural and cultural resources.
	Provide for fire-dependent ecological communities and wildlife populations, and restore the dynamic role of fire in Big Cypress.
Wildlife Management	*Improve and maintain natural abundance and health of native species.*
	Improve the health and recruitment of Florida panther populations and their prey, and maintain Florida panther habitat.
	Maintain habitat for the Cape Sable seaside sparrow and red-cockaded woodpecker.
	Protect Liguus *tree snails and maintain their habitat.*
	Protect other endangered species.
	Eliminate or control feral hogs where they are not essential as panther prey; eliminate or control other exotic species in the preserve.

Cultural Resource Management:

Protect all cultural resources on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (prior to evaluation, protect all known cultural resources).

Cooperate with native Americans to continue their usual and customary use and occupancy of the preserve lands and resources subject to reasonable regulation for resource protection.

Protect native American ceremonial sites from discovery, intrusion, and disturbance.

Provide for maximum native American participation in any newly authorized revenue-producing visitor services within the preserve.

General Development:

Minimize impacts on floodplains and wetlands, rare and protected species, habitat diversity, and other natural resource values.

Provide for visitor services and operations with minimal development.

ISSUES NOT IN THE DRAFT GMP/EIS OR IN THESE HIGHLIGHTS

Regulation of Native American Use and Occupancy

The 1974 act establishing Big Cypress National Preserve allows members of the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes to continue their usual and customary use and occupancy of federal lands and waters within the preserve. This includes hunting, fishing, and trapping on a subsistence basis and traditional tribal ceremonial activities. The act also provides for maximum Indian participation in any authorized future revenue-producing visitor service within the preserve. While closely related to natural resource issues, the impacts of these traditional Indian activities on the cultural and natural resources are, as yet, only partially understood.

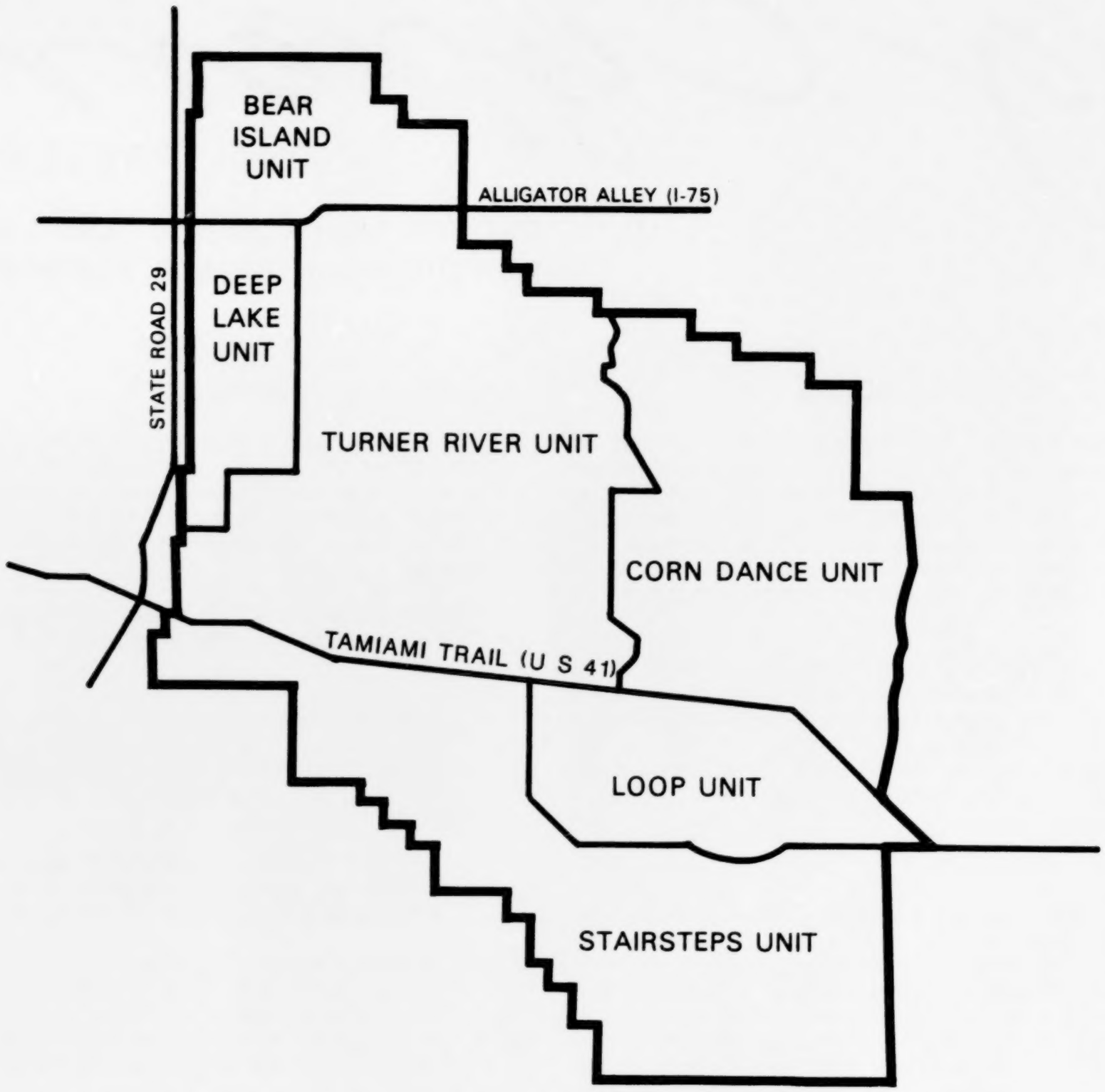
Specific issues relating to Miccosukees and Seminoles must be dealt with in a manner that recognizes their use and occupancy rights while maintaining the "natural, scenic, hydrologic, floral and faunal, and recreational values" for which the preserve was established. In order to protect the rights of the Miccosukees and Seminoles, as well as the resource values of the preserve, the act directs the secretary of the interior to establish reasonable regulations. The draft GMP/EIS recognizes the intent of both the establishing act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, but it will not specifically propose regulations of native American activities. Regulations will be drafted separately to address such activities within Big Cypress National Preserve.

Addition of New Lands to the Preserve in 1988

In 1988 Public Law 100-301 added 146,000 acres to Big Cypress National Preserve. The National Park Service will prepare an addendum to the final general management plan for the development and management of these additional lands. Therefore, this document and the draft GMP/EIS that it highlights do not address these additional lands.

SELECTION OF A PROPOSED ACTION

Federal law and NPS policy require the consideration of reasonable alternatives in the development of a general management plan. A proposed course of action and three alternative strategies are presented on the following pages. These strategies are derived from the original range of five alternatives and the existing conditions presented in the 1987 *Alternatives* pamphlet. The other alternatives include continuing management policies (as of 1985-86) – the status quo alternative; providing regional recreational opportunities – alternative A; and emphasizing the preservation of natural and cultural resources and allowing limited recreational opportunities – alternative B.



MANAGEMENT UNITS

BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SOUTHEAST REGION

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HUNTING

Hunting, together with off-road vehicle (ORV) use, is the most popular activity in the preserve. The major game species are white-tailed deer and European feral hogs. These species also are important prey for the endangered Florida panther. The management of deer and hog populations by means of hunting regulations is critical to the success of resource protection programs.

The principal objective for the management of hunting within the preserve is

Provide for diverse hunting opportunities at levels compatible with the purposes of the preserve.

To achieve this objective, the National Park Service proposes the following:

- **Allow hunting in all units. Establish a 40-day general gun season in the Bear Island, Turner River, Corn Dance, Loop, and Stairsteps units; manage numbers of hunters through a full-season quota; allow a total of 140 days of hunting per year.**

Establishing a full-season quota and non-transferable permit system, coupled with changing the length of the general gun season from 60 to 40 days, could alter hunting patterns within the preserve. The nontransferable, full-season quota would be an equitable selection system based on a random draw and would eliminate the informal transfer of permits. The proposal would also allow for more accurate data collection since the exact number of hunters would be known.

The combination of the full-season quota and the planned 40-day general gun season, along with other deer and hog management proposals, could be a primary game management tool for reducing deer and hog harvest by as much as 25 to 50 percent. To accomplish this reduction, the hunter quota for the general gun season might have to be reduced. The number of quota permits would be determined annually by the National Park Service and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Over the next five to 10 years these actions – the full-season quota, the shorter hunting season, and the anticipated reduction in the number of deer and hogs harvested – could cumulatively result in increased deer and hog populations. However, if the proposal resulted in a dramatic and immediate increase in the deer and hog populations, then the level of hunting activity could be increased.

The full-season permits would give managers a better tool to monitor the number of hunters using the preserve, and also the quantity and quality (health) of the game harvested. The gathering of more accurate data would allow for improved long-term game management recommendations and hunting regulations.

- **Allow only bird dogs in the Bear Island and Corn Dance units. Permit dogs for deer and hog hunting during part of the general gun season and for bird and raccoon hunting in the Turner River unit. Allow no dogs in the Deep Lake, Loop, and Stairsteps units.**

There is evidence that the use of dogs for deer hunting increases the number of animals taken and that there are fewer deer per acre in areas where dogs are used for hunting. Dogs would be prohibited in the Stairsteps unit because scattered hammocks provide the only raised areas where deer can escape high water. Consequently, deer are highly vulnerable to hunting with dogs.

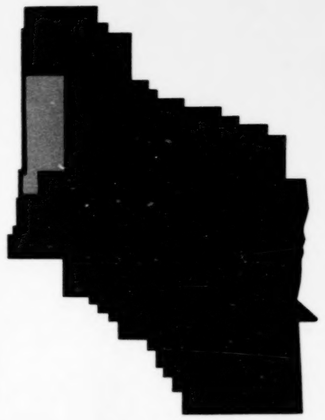
The intent of prohibiting dogs in the Deep Lake and Loop units is to provide a walk-in area to vary the hunting experience. Further, the change would reduce the harvest of deer, allowing their numbers to recover in the Deep Lake unit.

- **Allow only bow hunting in the Deep Lake unit.**

Reserving the Deep Lake unit only for bow hunting would enhance the experience for this group of hunters. It would also allow the recovery of the deer population, which is depressed in this unit.

- **Allow only walk-in hunting in the Deep Lake and Loop units.**

Walk-in hunting would provide additional variety in the hunting experience. It would also contribute to the recovery of the deer population in the Deep Lake unit, and it would retain the Loop unit for walk-in, general gun, and primitive weapons hunting.



PROPOSED ACTION

- Allow hunting in all units. Establish a 40-day general gun season in the Bear Island, Turner River, Corn Dance, Loop, and Stairsteps units; manage numbers of hunters through a full-season quota; allow hunting a total of 140 days per year.
- Allow only bird dogs in the Bear Island and Corn Dance units.
- Permit dogs for deer and hog hunting during part of the general gun season and for bird and raccoon hunting in the Turner River unit.
- Allow no dogs in the Deep Lake, Loop, and Stairsteps units.
- Allow only bow hunting in the Deep Lake unit.
- Allow only walk-in hunting in the Deep Lake and Loop units.

LEGEND

- 60-day general gun season/9-day quota*
- General gun season with a full-season quota*
- Bow hunting only
- Bows and muzzle-loaded firearms only
- Hunting prohibited

* Bow, muzzle-loaded firearms, small game, turkey, and migratory bird hunting remain unchanged.

DEFINITION

Full-season quota means to expand the existing 9-day hunter quota permit system to the entire general gun hunting season. The permit would not be transferable. The number of permits would be determined annually by the National Park Service and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

STATUS QUO

- Allow hunting in all units; continue a 60-day general gun season; manage numbers of hunters for the first nine days through a quota permit system; allow hunting on as many as 280 days per year.
- Permit only bird dogs in the Bear Island unit.
- Permit dogs for deer and hog hunting during part of general gun season and for bird and raccoon hunting in the Deep Lake, Turner River, Corn Dance, and Stairsteps units.
- Allow no dogs in the Loop unit.
- Reserve the Loop unit for walk-in hunting (no dogs or motorized transportation allowed).

ALTERNATIVE A

- Allow hunting in all units; establish a 40-day general gun season; manage numbers of hunters through a full-season quota; allow hunting on as many as 280 days per year.
- Allow only bird dogs in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, and Corn Dance units.
- Permit dogs for deer and hog hunting during part of the general gun season and for bird and raccoon hunting in the Turner River, Loop, and Stairsteps units.
- Reserve no units for walk-in hunting only.

ALTERNATIVE B

- Allow hunting in the Turner River, Loop, and Stairsteps units; allow hunting 140 days per year.
- Allow no hunting in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, and Corn Dance units.
- Establish a 30-day general gun season in the Turner River and Stairsteps units.
- Allow only bird dogs in the Turner River unit.
- Allow no dogs in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, Corn Dance, Loop, and Stairsteps units.
- Allow only walk-in hunting in the Loop unit.
- Reserve the Loop unit for bows and muzzle-loading firearms only; allow no dogs or motorized transportation.

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OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Currently ORVs enter the preserve at many locations and are free to travel almost anywhere in the preserve. Only the Loop unit, the Eleven Mile Road, and the Florida National Scenic Trail are closed to ORV use. During the 1986–87 season, the National Park Service issued 1,627 permits for ORVs. Vehicle types include traditional swamp buggies and also the smaller, more mobile all-terrain vehicles. Hunters historically make up the majority of ORV users.

Public Law 93-440 allows for the use of ORVs on designated roads and trails in the preserve. The proposed action would provide for their continued use, consistent with the legislation and in conformance with the stated management objectives, including the protection of important resource areas.

The principal objective for the management of ORVs within the preserve is

Provide for diverse visitor experiences at levels compatible with the purposes of the preserve.

This objective would be achieved by implementing the following proposed actions:

- **Permit ORVs only on designated trails in the Bear Island and Corn Dance units; maintain Perocchi Grade / Bear Island Road as a designated ORV trail (no street-legal vehicle access).**

Bear Island has the highest concentration of important resource areas in the preserve. It is particularly rich in inland marshes and hardwood hammocks, and it supports probably the healthiest remaining population of Florida panthers in Big Cypress. The Corn Dance unit also contains known panther habitat. Limiting ORV use solely to designated trails would prevent potential disturbance to panthers, aid in managing hunting activity, and protect important resource areas.

- **Permit ORVs on designated trails and areas in the Turner River and Stairsteps units. Allow only airboats in the Stairsteps unit south and east of Gator Hook Strand.**

ORV trails and areas would be designated, allowing for dispersed use. Even though many existing trail segments would be incorporated into these use areas, some existing trail segments or areas would be closed to ORV use to control impacts on soils and vegetation.

ORV impacts can be directly associated with water levels and soil types. ORV management in the Stairsteps unit would be different to the north and west of Gator Hook Strand than south and east. South and east of the strand marsh and wet prairie vegetation are dominant, and soils often remain saturated, even through the dry season. North and west of the strand soils tend to dry more readily. Therefore, only airboats would be allowed south and east of Gator Hook Strand.

- **Allow no ORVs in the Deep Lake and Loop units.**

Deep Lake would not be open to ORV use because of the important resource areas and documented panther activity within this unit. To maintain the primitive character of the Loop unit, it would continue to be closed to ORV use and retained for walk-in hunting only. The unit also would be used as a control zone for measuring the extent of ORV impacts in other areas of the preserve.

- **Allow only pedestrian access from I-75 at mile-marker 31.**

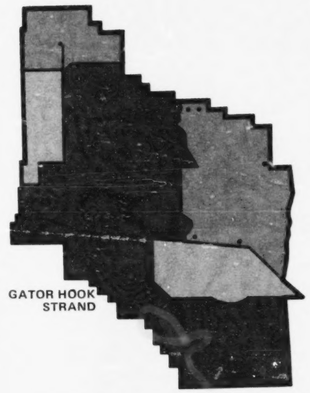
Research by the National Park Service and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission indicates that the northern portion of the preserve, through which I-75 will pass, has the highest concentration of Florida panthers in Big Cypress. Therefore, ORV access off I-75 is not proposed within the current preserve boundary.

- **Prohibit tracked vehicles in all units.**

These vehicles have been shown to cause soil and vegetation damage.

- **Limit the number of ORV permits to 2,500 per year.**

Limiting the number of ORV permits would help maintain a quality experience for ORV users and also ensure the protection of soils and vegetation, while minimizing the disturbance to wildlife populations.



PROPOSED ACTION

- Allow ORVs in the Bear Island, Turner River, Corn Dance, and Stairsteps units.
- Permit ORVs only on designated trails in the Bear Island and Corn Dance units; maintain Perocchi Grade / Bear Island Road as a designated trail (no street-legal vehicle access).
- Permit ORVs on designated trails and areas in the Turner River and Stairsteps units. Allow only airboats in the Stairsteps unit south and east of Gator Hook Strand.
- Allow no ORVs in the Deep Lake and Loop units.
- Allow only pedestrian access from I-75 at mile-marker 31.
- Prohibit tracked vehicles in all units.
- Limit the number of ORV permits to 2,500 per year.

LEGEND

- Unrestricted ORV use
- ORVs allowed on designated trails and areas
- ORVS allowed only on designated trails
- ORVS prohibited
- • General location of developed or undeveloped access points

DEFINITIONS

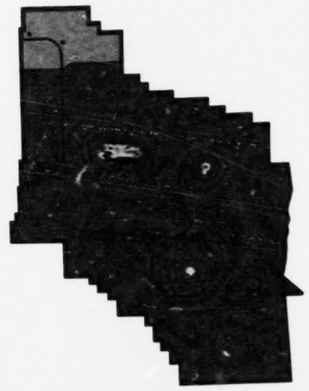
Designated trails are specifically marked routes for ORVs. These narrowly defined corridors would be designated to protect important and sensitive preserve resources. The trails usually would be located on existing ORV routes. From time to time, designated trails might need to be relocated to allow the corridor to recover from heavy use. Persons knowledgeable about specific trails, areas, inholder needs, and resources would be consulted in the selection of these routes after a general management plan has been approved.

Designated areas are broadly defined areas – usually marked on a map – within which ORV users could select their specific routes. As use dictated, designated areas might need to be changed to allow the areas to recover from heavy use or to protect important resources.

ORV access points include both developed and undeveloped access points. The points shown on the alternatives maps represent general locations and numbers only. The draft GMP/EIS indicates the location and type of each ORV access facility.

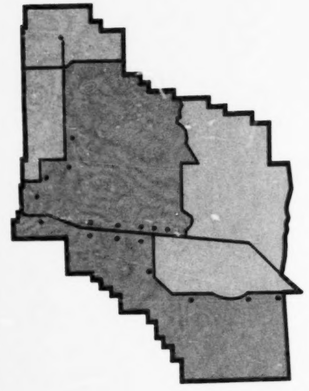
STATUS QUO

- Allow ORVs in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, Turner River, Corn Dance, and Stairsteps units.
- Allow no ORVs in the Loop unit.
- Do not restrict ORV use to designated trails and areas.



ALTERNATIVE A

- Allow ORVs in all units; reopen the Loop unit to ORVs.
- Confine ORVs to designated trails in the Bear Island unit; improve the Perocchi Grade / Bear Island Road for street-legal vehicle access; provide a primitive campground in the eastern portion of the Bear Island unit.
- Allow ORV access south from I-75 at mile-marker 31 (in the northern portion of the Turner River unit).



ALTERNATIVE B

- Allow ORVs in the Turner River and Stairsteps units.
- Confine ORVs to designated trails in the Turner River and Stairsteps units.
- Prohibit ORVs in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, Corn Dance, and Loop units.
- Allow only pedestrian access from I-75 at mile-marker 31.
- Prohibit tracked vehicles and V-type tractor tires in all areas.
- Limit the number of ORV permits to 1,500 per year.

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VISITOR SERVICES

Few services are currently provided for the general public in Big Cypress. Most use is by hunters, ORV recreationists, and owners of improved properties. The means of public access to the backcountry are limited, and visitors have few opportunities to learn about and appreciate the unique resources found in the national preserve.

The objectives for the development and management of visitor services within the preserve include:

Orient visitors to Big Cypress and foster an understanding of the natural and cultural history of the Big Cypress swamp.

Provide appropriate, resource-related recreational opportunities.

Provide for public safety.

Under the proposed plan these objectives would be achieved by means of the following actions:

- **Expand interpretive programs.**

Interpretive opportunities would be increased to reach a broader spectrum of the public. Actions would include improving interpretive facilities at Oasis, six self-guided walks, three orientation wayside exhibits, and two designated canoe trails. The Loop Road interpretive center would continue to provide programs for schoolchildren.

- **Allow backcountry camping anywhere in the Turner River and Loop units.**

Because of easy access to the Turner River and Loop units from existing improved roads and the Florida National Scenic Trail, these units contain the majority of backcountry use, and recreational opportunities would be improved.

- **Allow backcountry camping only at designated sites in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, Corn Dance, and Stairsteps units.**

The use of designated sites would protect important resource areas and wildlife habitat by concentrating rather than dispersing camping impacts. It would further enhance game management activities.

- **Construct approximately 50 backcountry camping shelters throughout the preserve.**

Hunters, ORV users, and other recreationists who do not own improved properties have relatively few opportunities to stay overnight in the backcountry. Public backcountry camping shelters would be constructed to remedy this situation. The locations would be selected to ensure the continued protection of wildlife, endangered species habitats, and archeological sites.

- **Provide six primitive campgrounds near existing improved roads.**

Few visitor facilities are now available in the preserve, and the demand for facilities such as campgrounds is increasing. To meet this demand and to minimize the impact on important resources, optimum use would be made of improved roads and previously disturbed areas on the preserve's perimeter.

- **Improve the Loop Road and provide interpretive wayside exhibits and trails.**

An improved road on the perimeter of the Loop unit and along the northern edge of the Stairsteps unit would offer an excellent opportunity for natural history interpretation and environmental education.

- **Expand concession services.**

New concession facilities would be developed at Ochopee and Pattons and would provide food service, guide service, ORV tours, and ORV storage.

PROPOSED ACTION

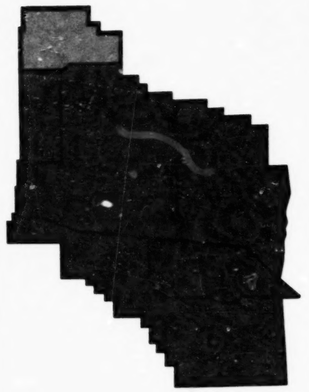
- Expand interpretive programs.
- Allow backcountry camping anywhere in the Turner River and Loop units.
- Allow backcountry camping only at designated sites in the Bear Island, Deep Lake, Corn Dance, and Stairsteps units.
- Construct approximately 50 backcountry camping shelters throughout the preserve.
- Provide six primitive campgrounds near existing improved roads.
- Improve the Loop Road, and provide interpretive wayside exhibits and trails.
- Expand concession services.

LEGEND

Undesignated backcountry camping

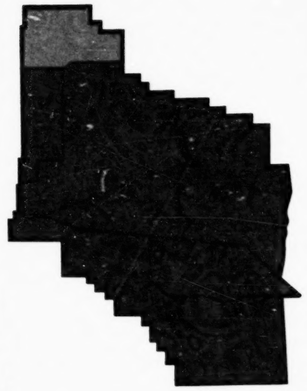
Backcountry camping only at designated sites

Florida National Scenic Trail



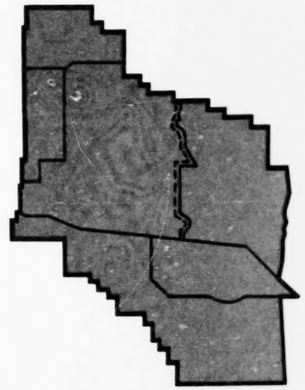
STATUS QUO

- Provide no interpretive programs.
- Allow backcountry camping anywhere in the Deep Lake, Turner River, Corn Dance, Stairsteps, and Loop units.
- Allow backcountry camping only at designated sites in the Bear Island unit.
- Continue five primitive campgrounds near improved roads.
- Provide no new concession services.



ALTERNATIVE A

- Expand interpretive programs.
- Allow backcountry camping anywhere in the Deep Lake, Turner River, Corn Dance, Stairsteps, and Loop units.
- Allow backcountry camping only at designated sites in the Bear Island unit.
- Construct approximately 50 backcountry camping shelters throughout the preserve.
- Provide eight primitive campgrounds.
- Relocate access to the Florida National Scenic Trail from Oasis to Ochopee.
- Improve the Loop Road, and provide interpretive wayside exhibits and trails.
- Improve the Perrochi Grade / Bear Island Road for automobile access to the Bear Island unit, and provide interpretive wayside exhibits and trails.
- Expand concession services.



ALTERNATIVE B

- Provide limited interpretive programs.
- Allow backcountry camping only at designated sites throughout the preserve.
- Provide four primitive campgrounds near existing improved roads.
- Improve the Loop Road (no wayside exhibits).
- Provide no new concession services.

VISITOR SERVICES

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MINERALS MANAGEMENT

The exploration and development of private oil, gas, and other minerals within the preserve is allowed under Public Law 93-440. Bear Island and Raccoon Point are now the only actively producing oil fields in the preserve. There is potential for future development, and the locations and timing of these activities would be managed in accordance with Public Law 93-440 and federal regulations for nonfederal oil and gas rights (36 CFR 9B).

Management objectives for mineral resources include

Permit access to private mineral holdings while at the same time ensuring the following:

the protection of important resource areas

the protection of air and water quality in Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park

the mitigation of surface disturbance

the restoration of abandoned sites

Avoid conflicts with visitor use and enjoyment, and provide for visitor safety.

The following proposed actions would achieve these planning objectives:

- **Permit surface occupancy for exploratory drilling and production outside of vegetation communities and cultural sites identified as important resource areas.**

Protecting important vegetation communities and cultural resource areas is essential to meet the legislative mandate for Big Cypress. Mineral resources beneath environmentally sensitive resource areas could be explored and extracted by using state-of-the-art techniques such as directional (slant) drilling. Access roads, pads, and pipeline corridors would be required to avoid these areas.

- **Permit exploratory drilling and production of oil and gas in the Bear Island unit only from existing roads and pads.**

Currently Bear Island has several active oil and gas operations, as well as abandoned access roads and pads. Because of the large area already occupied by this development, allowing additional activities in unimpacted areas would not achieve the congressional mandate for Big Cypress. To prevent further impacts, future operations would be confined to existing roads and pads within Bear Island.

- **Review plans of operations for oil and gas activities on a case-by-case basis to ensure compliance with Public Law 93-440.**

Natural resources to the north of US 41 differ from those to the south in terms of their sensitivity to oil and gas activities. The Deep Lake, Turner River, and Corn Dance units, which are north of US 41, tend to have shorter hydroperiods, and dispersed important resources occupy about 38 percent of the area. The Stairsteps and Loop units, which are south of US 41, contain resources that are much more sensitive to mineral activities. Important resource areas are highly concentrated and cover approximately 60 percent of the area. In addition much of the remaining area is frequently covered by surface water that drains directly into one of the most pristine areas of Everglades National Park, with few natural or man-made barriers impeding its flow. Other portions of these units are surrounded by important resource areas. Access to these areas for mineral exploration or production might be difficult or impossible without adverse impacts on the important resource areas of Big Cypress or on Everglades National Park.

To protect important resource areas and other sensitive resources in Big Cypress, nonfederal subsurface interests might have to be acquired. Such acquisition would be more likely in the units south of US 41. To determine the need for such acquisition in any portion of the preserve, mineral trends, activities, and technological advances in extraction techniques would be monitored. If private oil and gas could be extracted by means that would not create adverse impacts, then a plan of operations could be approved and the oil and gas rights might not have to be acquired. However, if it was determined during case-by-case reviews of plans of operations that preserve values would be adversely affected by mineral extraction activities, then the acquisition of nonfederal subsurface interests would be pursued. If acquisition was necessary, donation or exchange would be the preferred method. It is expected that some purchases would be required, however, and acquisition would be possible only if funds were available. Condemnation might be used if all other means of protection were found to be inadequate. Wherever private subsurface rights were acquired, except in the case of donation, the owners would be compensated at fair market value. Until it was determined that nonfederal subsurface rights were to be acquired, all applicable federal regulatory authorities, including the requirements of 36 CFR 9B, would be fully applied to any proposed mineral activity in these portions of the preserve.

- **Allow regulated geophysical exploration in all units.**

Geophysical exploration results in a temporary use of the surface. The impacts of such exploration can range from the destruction of vegetation by cutting and ORV use, to increases in turbidity from ORV use, to shot hole drilling and the depositing of cuttings on the surface. These impacts would be minimized by the careful review of plans for geophysical exploration, stipulations on permitted operations, and the monitoring and enforcing of stipulations. To avoid unacceptable environmental impacts to important resource areas and to still allow mineral owners access to evaluate their mineral holdings, as required by law, vehicles used for geophysical exploration would be subject to the proposed ORV regulations.

- **Allow no more than 10 percent of the surface area of the preserve to be influenced by oil and gas activities at any one time.**

Currently petroleum exploration and production activities influence 6.7 percent of the preserve's surface area. The proposal would establish the acceptable level of development at a maximum of 10 percent of the surface area, thereby protecting 90 percent of the preserve from such effects at any one time. Oil and gas exploration and extraction activities have direct environmental effects (for example, vegetation removal or soil compaction) as well as indirect effects on adjacent areas (vegetation die-off as a result of spills or hydrological changes, or noise effects on wildlife). The total area directly or indirectly affected is called the "area of influence." This area of influence has been determined to extend one-half mile on any side of a road, pad, pipeline, or geophysical survey line. Therefore, the 10 percent limit would apply to the cumulative area of influence, including all existing, abandoned, and unreclaimed oil and gas operations. The 10 percent limit could be met by reclaiming abandoned oil and gas pads and access roads before any additional activities were permitted.

LEGEND

- Regulated exploration and development; important resource areas protected where possible
- Regulated exploration and development; important resource areas protected
- Exploratory drilling and production restricted to previously disturbed areas
- Expansion of Raccoon Point field limited to level presented in Exxon's 1981 *Master Plan of Operations*; important resource areas protected
- No surface activity allowed
- Units south of US 41 containing resources that are highly sensitive to oil and gas activities

PROPOSED ACTION

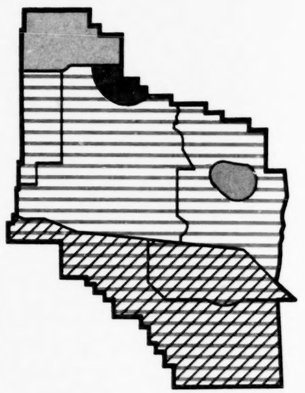
- Permit surface occupancy for exploratory drilling and production outside of vegetation communities and cultural sites identified as important resource areas.
- Permit exploratory drilling and production of oil and gas in the Bear Island unit only from existing roads and pads.
- Review plans of operations for oil and gas activities on a case-by-case basis to ensure compliance with Public Law 93-440.
- Allow regulated geophysical exploration in all units.
- Allow no more than 10 percent of the surface area of the preserve to be influenced by oil and gas activities at any one time.

STATUS QUO

- Avoid important resource areas where possible to reduce damage (using existing regulations).
- Allow geophysical exploration, exploratory drilling, and production of oil and gas throughout the preserve.

ALTERNATIVE A

- Avoid important resource areas where possible to reduce damage (using existing regulations).
- Allow geophysical exploration, exploratory drilling, and production of oil and gas throughout the preserve.
- Allow no more than 10 percent of the surface area of the preserve to be influenced by oil and gas activities at any one time.



ALTERNATIVE B

- Permit surface occupancy for exploratory drilling and production outside of vegetation communities and cultural sites identified as important resource areas.
- Permit exploratory drilling and production of oil and gas in the Bear Island unit only from existing roads and pads.
- Allow geophysical exploration and production of oil and gas in the northern section of the Turner River unit.
- Prohibit geophysical exploration and production in the Deep Lake, Loop, and Stairsteps units, half of the Corn Dance unit, and most of the Turner River unit to protect important resources.
- Restrict geophysical exploration and production of oil and gas in the northern half of the Corn Dance unit to existing development plans.
- Allow no more than 10 percent of the surface area of the preserve to be influenced by oil and gas activities at any one time.

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AVAILABILITY OF THE DRAFT GMP/EIS

The draft GMP/EIS for Big Cypress National Preserve will be mailed to concerned government agencies and organizations that commented on the 1987 *Alternatives* pamphlet. The draft GMP/EIS will also be available at the following locations:

Broward County Public Library
1301 West Companys Road
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Homestead Public Library
700 N. Homestead
Homestead, Florida

Miami-Dade Public Library
101 West Flagler Street
Miami, Florida

Collier County Public Library
650 Central Avenue
Naples, Florida

Everglades National Park Headquarters
Homestead, Florida

Big Cypress National Preserve
Headquarters and Oasis Ranger Station
Ochopee, Florida

Big Cypress Land Acquisition Office
201 8th Street, South
Naples, Florida

National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office
75 Spring Street, SW
Atlanta, Georgia

GPO 859-238

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National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office
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